

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
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Although some may argue against the use of cameras and video surveillance systems, modern technology is certainly helping law enforcement agencies solve crimes. It seems there's a story on the news each night about an incident, complete with video footage of the crime. Police are able to post videos and pictures and reach an audience like never before. Segments, such as New England's Most Wanted on FOX 25, have led to the apprehension of wanted subjects in our area. Apprehending these suspects also helps to prevent further crimes and makes every community safer. The ability of police to disseminate this information to the public, through the help of the media and social networking, is a classic example of what community policing is; groups working together to fight crime.

The public should be cautious though and realize not every incident makes the ten o'clock news. Sure, it's great to see a store clerk fend off a robber but sadly, not every case has a happy ending. While the frustration of being a victim of a crime, especially a robbery, may tempt you into fighting back, police discourage the practice. Anyone who goes to the extent of forcibly taking the money or property of someone else is a dangerous person. Even if no weapon is displayed, many criminals are carrying real guns, so assume the threat is legitimate. Any time I speak with a group of employees, I stress the fact there's nothing worth risking their life or the lives of co-workers and customers in their business. Videos of crimes where victims are seriously injured or killed rarely make the news but happen too often.

A robbery is the forceful taking of one's property, which makes the crime itself violent. Many perpetrators are using alcohol, suffer mental illness or are desperate to satisfy a drug habit. They are scared, not thinking straight and focused on one goal, getting what they want. Although he or she may not intend to hurt anyone, many criminals will not think twice about doing so if met with resistance. A number of ordinary items can quickly be turned into a weapon, so assume every criminal is armed. In Amesbury, police typically investigate a few armed robberies each year and no business is exempt.

In the event you find yourself in a robbery attempt, either as an employee or a customer in a store, try to remain calm. Naturally, this is easier said than done but critical to your safety. Avoid making any sudden movements, which could startle the robber. Follow his or her instructions and give them what they want. The robber will want to get in and out of the business quickly, so don't try to stall or confuse him. A hostage situation is extremely dangerous and unpredictable so allow the robber to leave. Once it's safe, lock the door and call police immediately. Encourage any witnesses to remain on the scene and don't touch anything. Police may be able to collect valuable forensic evidence, which can lead to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.

When it comes to taping or photographing a crime, remember to keep your safety in mind. Don't risk injury, to you or anyone else, in order to capture a picture or video. Police utilize several resources during the investigation of a crime; witness accounts, the observations of victims and physical evidence. It's just like putting a puzzle together and making sure all the pieces fit properly.

In closing, I'd like to express sincere sympathies to the family of John Zabriskie, who recently passed away. John was my first boss, hiring me as a delivery person, stock boy and clerk at Zabriskie's Pharmacy when I was in High School. He taught me several traits, which I have held onto throughout the years. John took pride in the importance of customer service, respect for others and that it was okay to work hard. John also was dedicated to community service and volunteerism, operating a small independent pharmacy provided the opportunity to help those in need. The experience of working at Zabriskie's Pharmacy has helped me tremendously in my role as community policing officer and I'm forever grateful to John for his guidance.